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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000470

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; USPACOM FOR FPA
COMMERCE FOR ITA JEAN KELLY

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KISL](#) [MY](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: BURMESE MUSLIMS BRACE FOR FALLOUT

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 1368

[¶](#)B. RANGOON 255

Classified By: COM Carmen M. Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[¶](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Rangoon-based Muslim leaders are advising Muslims to expect a severe GOB reaction following the April 7 attack on the Burmese Embassy in Kuala Lumpur (ref A). The Foreign Ministry publicly condemned the attack, though avoiding mention of the attackers' ethnicity and religion, and convoked the UNHCR Representative April 8 demanding an explanation for the UNHCR documents allegedly found on the attackers identifying them as "Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar." The UNHCR Rep expects there will be some fallout for the Muslims in Arakan (Rakhine) State, though no reaction has been seen yet. END SUMMARY.

MUSLIMS EXPECT RETRIBUTION

[¶](#)2. (C) A Rangoon-based Arakan (Rakhine) politician and two Arakan Muslim leaders told us April 9 that they expect a severe reaction against Muslims in Arakan State sooner or later, following the attack on the Burmese Embassy in Kuala Lumpur by several Arakan Muslim refugees on April 7. They fear the GOB, which already represses the Muslim population, will further restrict National Registration Card issuance, passport issuance, domestic travel, and property ownership. The Arakanese Muslim clerics will instruct followers during Friday prayers to take precautionary measures when dealing with the authorities.

[¶](#)3. (C) The Arakan leaders all agreed the motive of attack was personal, not political, gang, or terrorist related -- evidenced by the home-made weapons used in the attack. If they had been terrorists, our interlocutors pointed out, the attackers would have done much more damage. The Muslim Arakan leaders said the attackers were not related to al-Qaida, and they felt that "al-Qaida will not target Burmese interests overseas because they (al-Qaida) won't get any profit from destroying Burmese properties."

UNHCR ALSO EXPECTS TROUBLE

[¶](#)4. (C) The UNHCR Representative to Burma, Rajiv Kapur, related to the COM April 8 that the MOFA Director General for International Organizations had convoked him to demand an explanation for a UNHCR letter allegedly found on the attackers identifying them as "Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar." Kapur told the DG that when UNHCR in Malaysia denies refugee status to a Muslim from northern Arakan State, UNHCR issues them a rejection letter simply identifying them as such. Kapur expects there will be negative consequences for the Muslims in Arakan State, but as yet, UNHCR officers and NGO partners have not detected any incidents.

THE TWO-TIME LOSER

[¶](#)5. (C) GOB contacts told us today that the Burmese Ambassador to KL is none other than U Hla Maung, who was also the Burmese Ambassador to Thailand in 1999 when former Burmese students raided and occupied the Burmese Embassy. U Hla Maung was formerly commander of a special OCMI unit responsible for handling Political Detentions, Interrogations, and Security Affairs for GOB VIPs.

[¶](#)5. (C) COMMENT: That the GOB treats overseas Arakan Muslims with contempt is no surprise, considering the GOB's restrictive policies against the Bengali-speaking Muslims in northern Arakan State (ref B). However, it is noteworthy that, just before the biggest Burmese Buddhist holiday of the year when latent inter-religious tensions could suddenly flare, the GOB in its press release avoided inflaming tensions by not mentioning the ethnicity or religion of the attackers. END COMMENT.

Martinez